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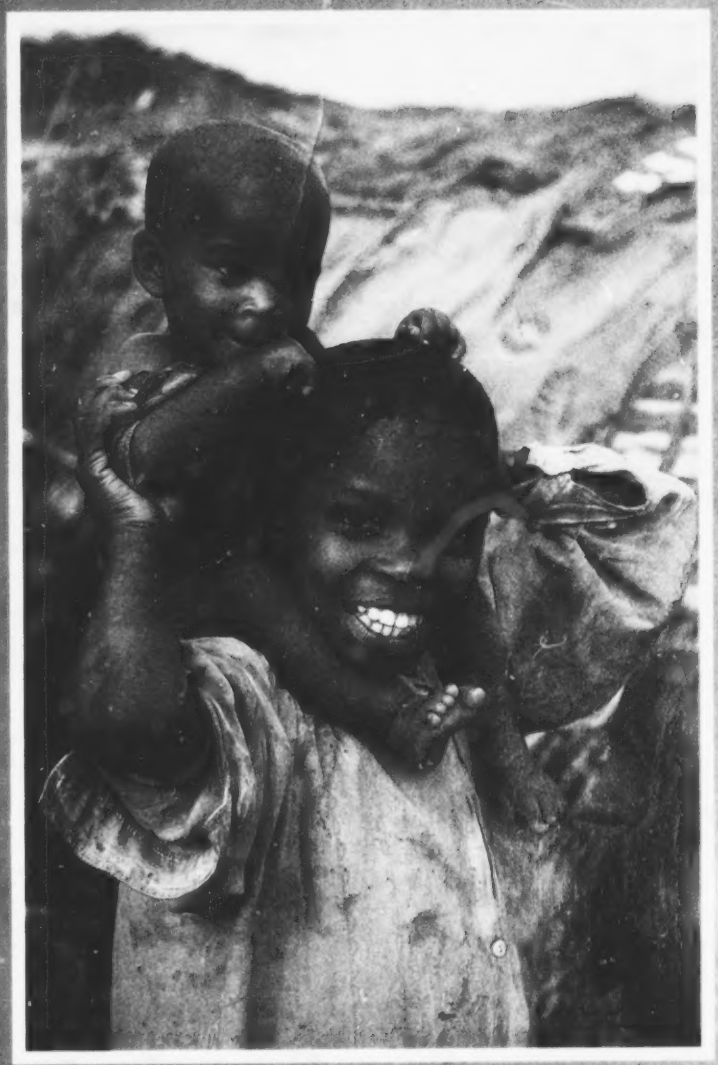

UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

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Cover: Burundi refugees in Mukindo camp, Rwanda, October 1993.
Photo: UNHCR/B. Press

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Ethiopian refugees arrive with their houses at Gurar border point, Kenya.

PHOTO: UNHCR / B. Press.

The future of asylum in Africa

More than a quarter century ago, African leaders saw a growing number of refugees spilling across borders, fleeing fighting and famine. The urgent need then – as now – was a more liberal asylum policy.

At a summit meeting on 10 September 1969, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted a convention urging generosity for asylum-seekers. The instrument came into force five years later, on June 20, which is celebrated as Africa Refugee Day.

The OAU convention follows the U.N. definition of a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol: persons fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution. Expanding this further, the OAU included people forced to leave ▶

▶ their country because of aggression, foreign occupation or domination or events disturbing public order.

The convention has been hailed for promoting the institution of asylum. It also has been copied elsewhere, particularly in Latin America. Unfortunately, since the OAU Convention was drawn up, the flood of refugees has become a torrent. In 1969, Africa had about 700,000 refugees. Of the world's 20 million refugees today, over 6 million are Africans. In addition, there are some 15 million internally displaced people on the continent, part of the estimated global figure of 25 million. Since the 1960s, the problems of the region have multiplied and become so complex the OAU has its hands full dealing with them.

Salim Salim, the OAU secretary-general, expressed mixed feelings on the 20th anniversary of Africa Refugee Day. He said that despite significant OAU initiatives, mass movements across borders continue. "We are still concerned that people are forced to flee their countries because of persecution or the perception of persecution. We still have on our continent millions of people who have been rendered refugees. And to that extent, it is something which is still depressing to the continent."

Nicolas Bwakira, UNHCR Africa bureau director, said he expects mass movements to continue. What is worrying, said Bwakira, is the apparent erosion of the generosity that African countries have shown to people forced to cross frontiers in ever-growing numbers. Refugees have become a burden to their hosts, who most often are impoverished. "What is of critical importance is peace," said Bwakira. "Without peace, it's impossible to resolve refugee issues."

In fact, UNHCR has found itself increasingly in conflict zones as internal disturbances have erupted in many places on a scale not seen during the Cold War. In East Africa, for example, UNHCR has been conducting a cross-border operation from Kenya to provide food to Somali returnees and displaced people.

This involvement with internally displaced persons is part of what High Commissioner Sadako Ogata calls a "strategy of prevention, preparedness and solution." At a recent colloquium, Mrs. Ogata broadly outlined the heart of the UNHCR mission today: "We should make every effort to ensure that people are not forced to flee their homes in the first place, but if they are, then we must meet their humanitarian needs and promote conditions which will allow them to return home in safety and dignity."

Bwakira said in practical terms, the prevention strategy meant closer cooperation among the various regional organizations (such as the OAU) and UN agencies, and moving at the right time to defuse a potential crisis. He urged the creation of permanent coordinators who will supervise humanitarian and political initiatives in major trouble spots in the continent. The international

Africa Refugee Day:

The spirit of generosity

When we celebrate Africa Refugee Day this year, we'll be doing so with mixed circumstances on the continent. On the one hand, we are still concerned that people are forced to flee their countries because of persecution or the perception of persecution. We still have on our continent millions of people who have been rendered refugees. And to that extent, it is something which is still depressing to the continent.

On the other hand, however, there are significant efforts being made to address the root cause of the refugee problem. We understand, for example, that one of the major contributing factors to the refugee problem is the conflict situation on our continent. The OAU is now making sustained, deliberate, and in some cases successful efforts to address ourselves to internal conflicts. I think by doing so we will be making a major contribution to the resolution of the refugee problem.

African countries are very generous in their treatment of refugees. This is one continent where a refugee is considered a member of the family. Most of our countries are having formidable social and economic problems, and as a result of that, it is extremely difficult to provide for the refugees. And yet people make sacrifices and do whatever they have to, to share with their brothers and sisters. The spirit of generosity will continue because it is part of the African tradition. But I think it is also incumbent upon the international community to do what they can to provide effective assistance in order to ameliorate the conditions of the refugees.

I wish to pay particular tribute in this case to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and to the work done by the High Commissioner, Madame Ogata, in sensitizing public opinion to the plight of African refugees. But more importantly, by taking concrete measures to address the problems of African refugees.

And so, as we mark Africa Refugee Day and the 20th anniversary of the implementation of the OAU Convention on refugees in Africa, it is my firm belief and conviction that in the near future we will be talking about the refugee problem in Africa as a historical reference, rather than as a continuing problem.

SALIM A. SALIM
Secretary-General
Organization of African Unity
Maputo, 6 March 1994.

community should play a major role not only in providing assistance to refugees and internally displaced peoples, but also in the rehabilitation of war-devastated countries.

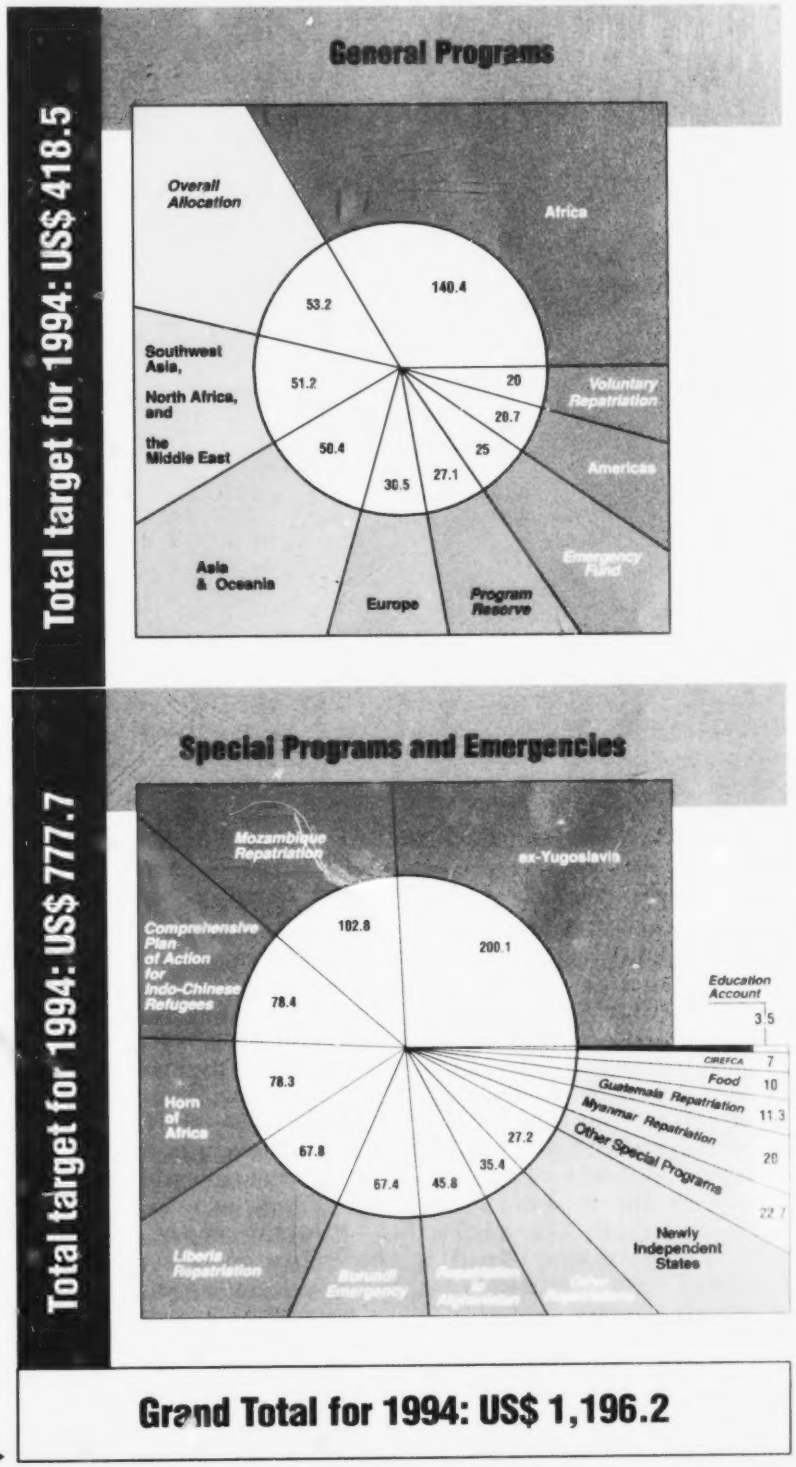
There have, however, been criticisms of western-inspired prescriptions for Africa's ills. The case of Angola is often cited. Africans should be left to sort out African problems, commentators say. Centuries-old tribal animosities have emerged in the region since the demise of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of ideological blocs. "In the post-Cold-War era, there is the whole issue of democratization. People are talking of capitalism without capital in a continent without a middle class," said UNHCR's Mengesha Kebede. "All of a sudden, we were back to tribal politics." In many countries, a president is seen more as a tribal leader than as a head of government.

The Horn of Africa illustrates the turmoil that is tearing much of Africa apart today. Clan wars, separatist movements and famine have forced millions of refugees to flee from one country to another over the past three decades. Internal conflicts have become more intense over the past three years. In Somalia alone, some 1 million Somalis left for neighboring countries and over 300,000 others have lost their lives since 1991. A semblance of normality after a U.N. humanitarian operation a year ago allowed the return of over 250,000 Somalis, but continued civil strife in the capital Mogadishu has discouraged large-scale repatriation.

The crisis in Somalia accelerated the return of some 500,000 Ethiopian refugees back to their country. Ethiopia was then just emerging from the collapse of the Mengistu regime, during which more than 700,000 Ethiopians left. The Eritrean separatist movement in Ethiopia produced some 600,000 refugees in the Sudan. Since independence in 1993, over 90,000 Eritreans have returned home and UNHCR is helping the new government in Asmara conduct a voluntary repatriation program for Eritrean refugees. Ethiopia also now ▶

UNHCR FINANCIAL NEEDS IN 1994

(in millions of US$)



UNHCR L. Taylor

Returnees from Guinea registering in Monrovia, Liberia. UNHCR is responsible for bringing home close to 700,000 Liberian refugees.

is home to some 375,000 refugees, including 250,000 Somalis and 20,000 Sudanese.

Sudan, which according to government statistics hosts 840,000 refugees, is itself locked in a bloody civil war in the south. More than 350,000 Sudanese refugees are in Zaire, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and Kenya. A Sudanese government offensive early this year has forced over 100,000 people from their homes in southern Sudan. This continued conflict is preventing Sudanese refugees like Martha Ahmad from returning home soon.

Ahmad, aged 38, has been living at the Bonga Camp in Ethiopia, which cares for over 40,000 Sudanese refugees. She belongs to the Uduk tribe, which used to cultivate maize, sorghum and sesame in the lush Blue Nile region of central Sudan. She left her home at Kurmah village in 1990 after soldiers came and told the people they had to embrace Islam. Ahmad, a Catholic, departed. "We walked for one month. There was no food, no water. We ate roots, leaves, insects and wild animals," she said.

Ahmad dreams of returning to her village and her tribe, which anthropologists say is on the verge of extinction. "I want to see my village and my parents and I wish all Uduks will one day go back to Sudan, our country," she said.

Another 100,000 Sudanese are in Zaire, which also provides sanctuary to some 200,000 Angolans, 50,000 Rwandese and 80,000 Burundis. Small numbers of Sudanese have been trickling into Uganda as a result of a recent upsurge of fighting in southern Sudan. Uganda has become an important asylum country. It now cares for 200,000 refugees, including 80,000 Rwandese and 90,000 Sudanese.

One region that seems to defy solution is the Central African countries of Rwanda and Burundi. The two have been embroiled in ethnic clashes since before independence from Belgium in 1962. Hutus predominate in the two countries. They have been at odds with the minority Tutsis. OAU leaders, with assistance from the international community, have pursued initiatives to bring the two tribes together.

A failed coup attempt last October killed Burundi's first democratically elected president, a Hutu, setting back moves to put the country on the road to political normalcy. Ethnic clashes that followed sent over 700,000 Burundis across the borders in the largest refugee exodus since the Gulf War. Over 50,000 people were killed. Tensions eased early in the year in Burundi, allowing thousands of Burundis to return to their villages

On April 6, the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi were killed on their return from a peace conference in Tanzania aimed at resolving the crisis in Burundi. The incident rekindled ethnic hatreds and shattered a power-sharing accord sponsored by the OAU in 1993 between the government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front, which is comprised mainly of Tutsis. Widespread bloodletting ensued in which tens of thousands were killed. Two weeks after the bloodbath began, over 90,000 people from Rwanda had fled into four neighboring countries, including about 50,000 Burundis who returned to their country.

Peace efforts also suffered a setback in Angola, a major arena of East-West confrontations during the Cold War era. The rejection of the

September 1992 national election results by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) torpedoed moves to end a 16-year-old civil war that followed independence from Portugal. Renewed fighting, more vicious than that seen in the past, claimed a daily toll of 1,000 lives at the outset. The situation was exacerbated by the worst drought in southern Africa. Famine was killing over 100 people a day until a major international aid program was launched late last year to feed the starving. UNHCR had to suspend a program to repatriate over 300,000 Angolan refugees in Zaire and Zambia.

Despite the many problems afflicting the continent, hundreds of thousands of Africans have returned home since the OAU Convention was adopted, and repatriation movements are continuing. In Liberia, warring militias have agreed to implement a stalled peace agreement they signed in July 1993 to end what has become a forgotten war. Elections, previously set for February, have been rescheduled for September. A transitional government was installed last March. African peacekeepers later deployed in the interior to supervise the disarming of reluctant militias. Skirmishes in remote areas of Liberia continue, however.

Observed Augustine Mahiga, the UNHCR representative in Liberia: "The political process is irreversible. The military process is slow, but the net effect is that we have taken a giant step for peace." Under the peace accords mediated by the OAU and the U.N., UNHCR is responsible for bringing home close to 700,000 Liberian refugees – one of the world's largest refugee populations. Guinea hosts 415,000 Liberian refugees, Côte d'Ivoire 250,000, Sierra Leone 6,000 and Nigeria 3,000.

UNHCR has made an appeal for $67 million for its voluntary repatriation program in Liberia, a large part of which will go to integration projects in the war-devastated country. Liberia needs massive assistance to remove deadly land mines and to rebuild roads, bridges, irrigation systems, schools and clinics.

Since a peace accord was signed in Mozambique in October 1992, Mozambican refugees have begun streaming back to their country. More than 800,000 of the estimated 1.5 million Mozambican refugees have returned under UNHCR's voluntary repatriation program – the largest the office has ever undertaken in Africa. Many of them came back on foot. And many are grappling with the same problem that confronts returnees in war-ravaged countries elsewhere in Africa: from where will the next meal come?

The Horn of Africa illustrates the turmoil that is tearing much of Africa apart today.

The uncertain future is etched on the sad face of Romao Novela, 68-year-old father of five who returned to Mozambique last October after five years in Swaziland. "I knew there would be problems with food, but I am happy to be back in my country. At least I am suffering here and not in a strange country," he said. A former cattle breeder, his greatest wish is to acquire two oxen. He said the plot of corn land he had been given to farm at Josiah Tongongara village just south of Maputo was not enough to support his family.

While the need for assistance in Africa is great, the rash of emergencies elsewhere, particularly in the former Yugoslavia, has reduced the amount of aid going to the region. "I think Africa deserves more attention and more support than it has been getting," said Peter Herman de Clerqc of the UNHCR Africa Bureau. He particularly cited Mozambique, a country that has just come out of a long war and is struggling to get back on its feet economically.

"Everytime you go to Mozambique, you see improvements. Buildings are going up. Roads are being paved. Business is growing. Investment is coming in. It is a very hopeful situation. It will be a pity if, after putting itself politically on its feet, the country will not get a chance to make it. That will really be very sad," said de Clerqc.

Ernest Chipman, UNHCR's chief of fund raising, said getting donor support for its programs is a constant, if largely successful, battle. Over the last three years, UNHCR has been working on budgets of more than $1 billion, under a third of which is spent in Africa. "Donors are looking at limited budgets, how to divide this up geographically and then how to divide it up among the agencies," Chipman said. "These resources have to be spread equitably around." But in general, donor support remains for "credible and cost effective" projects in Africa and elsewhere.

Bwakira pointed out that the biggest donors in Africa are in fact the refugees' hosts. They provide land, meager resources and facilities, often at severe cost to their people and their environment. Some host countries have begun looking at asylum-seekers as potential security risks. Increasing numbers of firearms are spilling across frontiers from countries embroiled in civil wars. This proliferation of firearms is then, often unfairly, blamed solely on refugees.

There is resentment in Kenya, for example, at the security problems the presence of Somali refugees has brought. Last year, Kenyan security forces pushed back over 1,000 refugees from a border camp, something unheard of before in Africa. As democratization sweeps the continent, Bwakira said questions are also being raised on who is a refugee. Unless solutions are found to remedy forced migration, all these developments do not bode well for the future of the institution of asylum in Africa.

FERNANDO DEL MUNDO

Bridging the legal gap

The "traditional hospitality of African societies" towards refugees and the essentially liberal asylum policies which exist throughout Africa have often been commented on and praised. The prevailing view, rooted in a social anthropological reading of the phenomenon, is that African hospitality towards refugees is largely due to the commonly shared and binding historical and cultural ties among African peoples.

The important role of these historic forces in the foundations of African refugee policies and practices cannot be denied. Yet, the limitations of both the social anthropological explanation and of the cultural foundations themselves are becoming increasingly apparent in the face of the political, social and economic burdens of hosting over 6 million refugees. The history and development of African refugee law have had an equally important, and perhaps less well understood, part to play in the evolution of refugee protection and its future prospects in Africa.

By definition, a refugee has lost his or her national protection. He or she is in search of the substitute protection of another state and of the international community. The stakes are high: the refugee's life, liberty or personal security may be on the line. If their protection is to be assured, the refugees must, in the first instance, be allowed to enter another safer country and be secured against forcible return to danger. In addition, refugees must be treated in accordance with recognized legal principles and standards relating to their personal safety and their social, civil and economic rights. Refugees must also be able, ultimately, to return voluntarily to their countries in conditions of safety and dignity.

The realization of these fundamental rights for refugees entails specific legal obligations on the part of the asylum state. At the same time, the refugee, too, has certain obligations: Article 2 of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees declares that "every refugee has duties to the country in which he finds himself, which require that he conform to its laws and regulations as well as to measures taken for the maintenance of public order." This interplay of rights and obligations between refugees and states is not only what refugee law is about, but also underlines the extreme importance of that law to the system of international protection.

The major international legal instruments which form the basis for refugee protection are the 1951 Convention, to which 45 states in Africa have acceded, and its 1967 Protocol which has 46 accessions in Africa. These instruments are complemented by the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (42 accessions), and other relevant human rights instruments such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (49 accessions). To further underline this quite impressive record of accessions to international and regional refugee instruments in Africa, it should be mentioned that of the 53 states on the African continent, only four – Comoros, Eritrea, Namibia and South Africa – are not signatory to at least one of the three instruments mentioned above. However, one of these, Namibia, has taken the decision to accede to the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention.

> Violations of international refugee law continue in many parts of the continent.

The international refugee instruments are reinforced in several countries by national refugee legislation. Many of these laws have been promulgated with, among other things, the specific objective of incorporating the principles and norms expressed in the international refugee instruments in national legal systems.

Surely then, given all this, the extent and quality of legal protection for refugees in Africa should be high, if not outstanding? The answer to this question is both yes and no. On the positive side is the fact that, in many countries, the legal status and protection situation of refugees basically coincide with the essential requirements of refugee law. In any case, the situation of refugees is usually similar to the legal situation and average "quality of life" available to foreign residents or, indeed, national citizens.

On the negative side, however, is the fact that there continue to be quite serious violations of the basic dictates of refugee law in many parts of the continent. These include instances of denial of admission and asylum; restriction of refugees to camps or settlements; wrongful arrests and detentions; expulsion and refoulement; violence of various forms against refugees, particularly rape of refugee women and girls; recruitment of refugee children and adults into irregular forces; and the failure or inability to provide refugees with social and economic rights.

Why this schism and contradiction between legal stipulations and the reality? There are various explanations, including those of a legal, political, socio-economic and institutional nature.

In a number of countries, refugee-specific laws, reflecting legal concepts specifically tailored for and essential to refugee protection, have not been passed. Thus, legally, asylum-seekers and refugees remain subject to immigration, alien or security legislations whose basic sanctions are inconsistent with refugee protection.

For example, in South Africa, refugees are subject to the Aliens Act, under which they are liable to be considered as illegal immigrants and as such are exposed to forcible deportation from South Africa. This, together with the non-application of refugee law as outlined above, has for a long time been the single most important source of protection problems in South Africa, particularly for Mozambican refugees.

A related point is that an entire generation of refugee enactments, including those inherited from colonial administrations, was intended primarily to equip governments with legal powers and mechanisms to control and restrict refugees, rather than uphold their legal rights and entitlements. The refugee acts of, among others, Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana, Zambia and Swaziland fall into this category. In these legislations, the restrictive intent is obvious in that the word "control" often features in the title and objectives of the enactments.

In all these countries, of course, positive and sympathetic policies and attitudes towards refugees prevail. The point, however, is that these policies and attitudes are inconsistent with the national legislative stipulations. This, as well as the preceding point, may explain why, in many African countries, government "policies and attitudes" are often relied upon to resolve protection problems rather than actual legislation or judicial litigation.

Enactment of legislation primarily geared to refugee protection and treatment, in line with internationally recognized principles, is a relatively recent phenomenon. While various efforts promoting the enactment of positive legislation were already underway as early as the mid 1960s, the trend began in earnest in 1980, with the approval by UNHCR and the OAU of a jointly drafted model refugee legislation that was then used widely in discussions with governments concerning the promulgation of new laws or reform of existing ones.

The first significant results of these initiatives was the passage of very progressive and protection-friendly refugee acts in Zimbabwe and Lesotho in 1983. These have themselves in turn provided the ▶

▶ model and inspiration for legislation development in many countries, including Malawi and Ghana where, in 1989 and 1992 respectively, similarly favorable laws were passed.

However, even in these countries, forward-looking legal draftsmanship has not automatically translated into effective and refugee-friendly performance. One of the principal reasons for this is the low levels of government, institutional and personnel capacity which exist in many countries. This has resulted in an odd situation whereby, even though such countries have promulgated refugee-specific legislations, few have created departments or recruited and adequately trained personnel specifically to administer refugee matters. This is particularly true where refugee protection is concerned. Thus, in such countries, the agencies responsible for legal and protection matters are the national police, immigration department, security police or even the army. These institutions are, for obvious reasons, not necessarily ideally suited to sensitive management of refugee protection.

A related point is that the passage of even the most enlightened refugee-specific legislation has not fully resolved the problem of conflicting laws: other laws, mainly those dealing with immigration, national security, customs and excise, stock control, and public health, often permit measures that, when applied to refugees, may seriously compromise their protection.

In some cases, this situation arises from the fact that there is a tendency – for which UNHCR is on occasion partly to blame – to concentrate too much on the promotion of refugee laws and not enough on the rationalization and harmonization of the whole range of laws that may affect refugees' legal, social and material well-being. The latter approach would mean explicitly linking refugee laws with the other areas of national legislation referred to above, as well as those relating to land tenure and access, education, employment, social welfare, and naturalization.

In addition to purely legal constraints, there are others which might come under the heading of "political considerations" which also contribute to the limited observance of refugee law.

Today's typically massive and sudden refugee flows, caused by violent civil strife and the disintegration of societies, are increasingly accompanied by – or considered to contribute to – serious security problems in the host countries.

Among the principal reasons for this is the preponderance of dangerous weapons in refugees' countries of origin. These are often brought into refugee-hosting communities as displacement takes place. Furthermore, with the weakening in many countries of authoritarian government control over all aspects of national affairs, there is more frequent and visible competition between refugees and nationals over matters such as land, grazing ranges, water, fuel-wood and educational and public health facilities.

Similarly, as more and more countries are gripped by open, adversarial politics, suspicions develop that refugees may be manipulated by unscrupulous political parties to illegally participate in, and thereby influence the result of, elections, referenda or constitutional votes.

All these considerations influence refugee protection and refugee law in a fundamentally contradictory way. In most of the above-mentioned situations, governments feel obliged to take measures which they consider essential for "national security" but which, nevertheless, are inconsistent with refugee protection and standards of treatment. Even where refugee-specific laws and structures exist, the tendency is to resort to security laws, procedures and structures. Efforts by UNHCR to promote the promulgation of national refugee legislation where it does not exist or to reform inadequate or inappropriate laws are, for the same reasons, meeting stiffer and stiffer resistance. All of these factors serve to undermine refugee protection.

Efforts by UNHCR to promote new or reformed national refugee legislation are receiving stiffer and stiffer resistance.

However, inspite of (or indeed precisely because of) these reasons, the importance of national refugee law cannot be emphasized enough. While the legitimacy of other national forces and factors is recognized, it must be stressed that refugee protection cannot be fully achieved if refugee law, and particularly national refugee legislation, are not fundamentally consistent with the principles contained in international and regional instruments.

Refugee law must be, and be seen to be, a legal regime that has been designed not to shield states and governments from asylum-seekers and refugees, nor to facilitate their repression, but to enable those states and governments to protect and assist them in a humane and acceptable manner. Clearly, several other factors including policy and political and social considerations will play an important role in making this possible. Nevertheless, the passage of progressive and refugee-friendly national legislation is an extremely important requirement for refugee protection at a national level. The other equally important requirement, of course, is to then create policies and attitudes as well as institutional and personnel capacities to ensure that such legislation is observed and implemented in an effective, positive manner.

UNHCR strives to achieve precisely these objectives. So do the African asylum countries which without any doubt are truly generous and hospitable towards refugees. It is, however, vital that this generosity and hospitality should be reinforced by the enactment and implementation of favorable refugee legislation.

George Okoth-Obbo

Sealed with a kiss

"The refugees? They're people just like us."

"Yes, but they have been driven out of their country by war."

"And they have to start again from nothing, rebuild everything, get used to a foreign way of life that is completely unknown to them in order to be able to integrate. It's not easy for them."

Spoken by Stéphanie, Jean-Luc, Julie or Christophe, these comments come from the heart. To these French schoolchildren aged 13 to 15, refugees are no longer just people who are talked about at school and on television. Now they are faces, the faces of friends whom they met barely a month ago in the Saan Yoogo village camp in Burkina Faso.

This venture began with an idea that may seem a bit crazy. In 1991, Michel Giraudot, a teacher and the man behind a twinning arrangement between Cozes, a small town in France, and Tenkodogo in Burkina Faso, had the idea of producing a play jointly written and acted by pupils of Cozes College and their counterparts at the Lycée Rialé in Tenkodogo.

Then, in October 1993, came another initiative. Joining with UNHCR in an operation to make young people in France more aware of the needs of refugees, the group decided to take advantage of their trip to show solidarity with Tuareg refugee children in Burkina Faso.

Pupils, teachers and parents from Cozes and the surrounding area launched an operation called "A pencil for Saan Yoogo" to collect funds and school materials, such as pens and exercise books.

In February, the group of French pupils and teachers set off for Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. From there they proceeded to the village of Saan Yoogo, some 50 kilometers to the north, with a trunk full of educational materials.

"What struck me most," recalls Stéphanie, "was the welcome that awaited us from the Tuareg refugees. They said it was the first time that Europeans had come to see them. And we felt that it was important to them. It meant some form of recognition."

Vivid memories of the trip start to flood back: "They had collected presents for us," says Julie. "They gave us pens with our names on them. Even though, for them, pens are expensive and hard to come by."

"I was sitting on the rug," adds 8-year-old Anne. "A little girl came up to me. She knelt down in front of me, took off her necklace and put it round my neck. I had nothing to offer in exchange, so I gave her a kiss."

"They were building a school," explains Sylvie. "Meantime, their classes were held in a hut made of coconut fibre. The classes were really overcrowded. At the primary level, they had at least 100 kids in there."

Julie observes that "the people in the camp were almost all women and children."

For Michel Giraudot, this encounter with the people living in Saan Yoogo also served as a remarkable lesson in tolerance for his pupils. "Half the population of the village were indigenous and the other half were Tuareg refugees. And they are all on good terms with one another. It's true, of course, that in Saan Yoogo the integration of the refugees has led to development: a school is being built, land is being converted to market-gardening... But what French village would accept an influx of foreigners that doubled its population in the space of a few months?"

Aurélien, Julie, Cristophe, Anne and the other students are unlikely to forget their trip in a hurry. They still have the presents and the photos; but above all they want to continue to do exchanges with the refugee children. And there is a proposal to twin Cozes College with the Saan Yoogo school.

This is the kind of experience that UNHCR is trying to encourage for young people, for example through its agreement with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, and with programs developed along the lines of "Camp Sadako."

Girl Guides and Girl Scouts all over the world have been recruited by UNHCR to prepare packages of exercise books, ballpoint pens and colored crayons for children in refugee camps.

> "What French village would allow an influx of foreigners that would double its population in the space of a few months?"

The project known as "Camp Sadako" was launched in the summer of 1993, when a group of young Japanese students spent a month of their vacation working with unaccompanied Sudanese children in Kakuma camp in Kenya. Other groups of young volunteers will be following in their footsteps in 1994.

All these projects have the same goal: to make young people realize that refugees are just like everybody else. While they need help and understanding, they also have plenty to offer themselves.

Sylvie Daillot

Demilitarization crucial for return of refugees

To outsiders, the recent demobilization ceremony for soldiers in Mozambique's southwestern Inhambane province must have seemed more like a gathering of Boy Scouts than of military men.

Most of those receiving their discharge papers that day in mid-March were adolescents between 14 and 16 years of age. First in line was a fresh-faced youth of 16 who joined the RENAMO rebel forces when he was nine.

But despite their tender age, many of these boys and thousands of their comrades throughout Mozambique are battle-hardened veterans who have known nothing in their short lives but killing and war.

Finding a productive place in civilian life for them as well as their former enemies on the government side is proving to be one of the biggest challenges in the massive effort to rebuild a country devastated by 16 years of bitter civil war. And Mozambique is not alone in its attempt to deal with the many problems associated with reintegrating demobilized troops back into their communities.

"The demobilization of those bearing arms is of vital importance to the whole peace and reconstruction process," said UNHCR's Coordinator for Southern Africa, David Lambo. "In Somalia, Angola, Mozambique and other conflicts around Africa, demobilization and demilitarization are the linchpins for a secure future. And even though we are not directly involved in the demobilization process in Mozambique, its success is crucial for UNHCR's repatriation program in the sense that if there is continued insecurity, refugees simply won't go home."

UNHCR is currently involved in a three-year, $203 million repatriation and reintegration operation in Mozambique, the largest such program the organization has ever undertaken in Africa. By the end of this year, UNHCR hopes that up to two-thirds of the 1.5 million Mozambicans who fled their homeland for neighboring countries will have returned to help rebuild their nation.

Elections are scheduled for October.

Despite the importance of demilitarization and demobilization in conflicts around the world, there is no single international agency that specializes in the process. In Mozambique, for example, the government and several international and non-governmental organizations are involved in an $83.5 million program to demobilize and reintegrate some 70,000 soldiers and their families.

"This aspect of the peace process is increasingly important, but it sometimes doesn't seem to receive as much funding or outside attention as other classic humanitarian activities," Lambo said. "Things can fall between the cracks. In Angola, it was only partly completed so people were still bearing arms at the time of the election. Today, they are fighting again."

After the Angola experience, there is general agreement that armed groups must be disarmed and demobilized in the early stages of the peace process.

But even if politically-inspired hostilities between warring sides cease, there remains a very real danger of general lawlessness and banditry if the soldiers are not controlled, disarmed and provided with an alternative way to support themselves once they re-enter civilian life. In Mozambique, for example, roving bands of armed men are creating security problems in a number of areas, including Tete and Zambezia provinces and even in the capital, Maputo.

"If you're a young ex-soldier and you go home and find there's nothing there, you can very easily fall in with bad company and become part of a bandit group or private army," Lambo said. "Many young people, whether in Somalia, South Africa or Mozambique, are marginalized and have no other opportunities. If you're an unemployed youth and can get an AK-47 for anywhere between zero and $100, why not do it? Initially, you do it for survival, for basic needs. Then you get a taste for money and then it becomes an end in itself."

If the security situation deteriorates again those who have already come back may be tempted to leave again.

For a sustained peace and economic rehabilitation, the demobilization process in Mozambique incorporates a number of programs overseen by the Commission for the Re...gration of Demobilized Soldiers (CORE). These programs, ranging from the establishment of troop assembly areas to skills training and seed distribution, involve several organizations, including the U.N. peacekeeping force (ONUMOZ), the U.N. Development Program, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Organization for Migration, the International Labor Organization, MSF-Spain, Terre des Hommes, UNICEF, World Vision and others.

> "If you're an unemployed youth and can get an AK-47 for anywhere between zero and $100, why not do it?"

The demobilization process is being carried out in two phases. The first involves the concentration of troops in 49 assembly areas scattered around the country. The assembly of soldiers in these areas began on 30 November 1993. By 25 March 1994, more than 47,400 soldiers from both sides had reported to the assembly areas. Here, the soldiers surrender their weapons and are provided with food, clothing, health care and six months' severance pay for those who are not selected for inclusion in Mozambique's new, 30,000-member army. They are also given information on employment and training options, and those who opt for farming are provided seeds and tool kits. Approximately 80 percent of Mozambique's population is employed in agriculture.

The last task of the first phase is to transport those being demobilized to the destination of their choice within Mozambique.

Once back in their home areas, some of the ex-soldiers will receive further training, advice and assistance, and all will receive continuing cash payments under a "reintegration support scheme" lasting 18 months.

The continuing cash payments are considered essential because Mozambique's shattered economy simply cannot absorb such a large number of new workers. Initially, the support payments were to consist only of six months' severance pay, but it was later determined that the ex-soldiers would be unable to establish themselves economically in only half a year.

"Employment opportunities are very limited," Lambo said. "With Mozambique's shattered economy, it's no use giving someone six months' pay and some carpenter's tools and then telling them they're on their own. You've got to have an economy for them to be employed in, and right now this is only being established again after many years of war and destruction. It's going to take time and continued support from the international community is essential."

Mozambique has a tough road ahead. It must heal the deep wounds of 16 years of civil war, disarm tens of thousands of soldiers who know nothing but fighting, reintegrate more than 1.5 million refugees, change from a centrally planned to a market economy, rebuild a destroyed infrastructure and form a multi-party political system.

"The process is under way in Mozambique," Lambo said. "But it's not out of the woods yet... Healing takes time."

Increasingly, the international community is coming to the realization that a major component in that healing process is helping former fighters to lay down their arms and become productive, peaceful members of society.

Ron Redmond

New challenges for the peacemakers

There is no doubt in most minds that armed intervention for peacemaking purposes can be justified in special circumstances. In the case of blatant aggression, for instance, the international community is entitled to act and Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter gives it that right. The problem here is the suspicion which prevails, especially in the Third World, that the powerful members of the Security Council might be applying a double-standard.

There is, therefore, a need to establish solid criteria for the Security Council and to give the broad membership of the General Assembly some kind of input in the decision-making process. I believe especially that some middle powers should take the moral responsibility of monitoring this process as well as the implementation phase and provide whatever safeguards are necessary.

There is also a large consensus in the international community that the traditional peacekeeping operations initiated by Lester Pearson should continue. These focused, and should continue to focus, on conflict containment with the consent of the parties concerned. These peacekeeping operations have acquired new dimensions now with the task given to the U.N. of monitoring a comprehensive settlement agreed upon by all parties to a conflict. It was done successfully in Namibia. It seems to be working in El Salvador, although the U.N. was criticized for its handling of the last elections. The Cambodian operation raises, despite an apparent success largely due to the end of the Cold War, a number of questions. These include the scale of involvement, the expense, the nature of the consent given by the parties concerned, the interference of U.N. officials in strictly internal Cambodian matters (such as the initial opposition to the return of Prince Sihanouk), and some bitter aftertaste caused by behavior of U.N. personnel in Cambodian society. This deserves a full investigation. Peacekeeping in Angola has been largely a failure; and in Mozambique it is still at the initial stage.

We come now to the most recent manifestation of U.N. armed intervention and that is what many people call humanitarian intervention.

> "We cannot continue to approach these crucial issues with old-fashioned solutions... and obsolete structures."

Somalia and Bosnia are the most striking examples; and it was undertaken partly in Iraq. Armed intervention here is supposed to protect the delivery of emergency relief supplies and the people involved in humanitarian assistance. These operations raise several very serious questions on the conditions in which they have been initiated, their management, the logistics, and the political strategy.

The operation in Somalia, alone, is going to cost around $2 billion in order to protect less than $100 million of effective emergency relief. According to the *New York Times* of 8 December 1993, at least 6,000 Somalis and 83 U.N. peacekeepers might have fallen victim to the clashes between U.N. forces and Somali armed groups since UNOSOM II took over from Operation Restore Hope in April 1993. It is, in my view, a tragedy. It also deserves a full investigation so that we can draw some important lessons for the future.

The operation in Bosnia is another tragedy. The fatal confusion about the twin roles of NATO and the U.N., the deep contradictions within the Western camp and the very poor leadership of the U.N. management has led to the most incredible mess we have witnessed in the history of the U.N. What should be our attitude then towards humanitarian intervention?

Armed intervention in a humanitarian tragedy, in my view, should not be ruled out. We should, however, exercise maximum caution and restraint; and exhaust all other possibilities before using armed forces. Resorting to armed intervention can be disastrous if the political and social environment is not adequately prepared for it. Only when a majority of the important players feel the need for the deployment of armed forces, should this happen. This would mean that the role, the mandate, and the timing would have been thoroughly discussed and agreed upon, including with the neighboring countries and the regional organization concerned. It is important, on the other hand, that all aggravating factors must be dealt with very firmly. Interference from outside, such as the role of Serbia in the Croatian and Bosnian conflicts, or arms supplies to all parties to the conflict such as in Somalia, must be stopped first, exactly as in the case of external aggression.

Since intervention in a humanitarian tragedy is a new field, the United Nations and regional organizations must develop new guidelines specifying when and how they would become engaged, and what kinds of action they might take together, from among political, dip-

Returnees from Angola arrive at Windhoek, Namibia, in 1989. Peacekeeping operations were successful in Namibia.

lomatic, economic, humanitarian and military options.

Clearly, a comprehensive, preventive approach that involves all international development and humanitarian organizations, regional organizations as well as national development agencies and NGOs would offer the only real hope for many communities around the world threatened by civil war, humanitarian tragedy or total state collapse. We cannot continue to approach these crucial issues with old fashioned solutions or improvisation, and obsolete structures that are driven by short-term, unsustainable fixes.

Ideally, with the end of the cold war, the international community should take stock of the consequences of this worldwide confrontation and look at the present historical phase of humanity and the challenges it poses. We should draw a map of all existing and potential crises, examine the immediate and remote causes, and draw lessons from past experience on how some aggravating factors and the deterioration of the environment compound and ignite conflicts and wars. This kind of vision, and the leadership it requires, does not yet seem to manifest itself.

Meanwhile, we should improve our approach to conflict management by developing new skills and methods which can strengthen the capacity of the people themselves to resolve their immediate problems. Conflict management deals usually with four main objectives: cessation of hostilities or a ceasefire, the confidence-building process, the negotiation for a comprehensive agreement, and the implementation of the agreement.

Let me stress here the importance of the confidence-building process in conflict management. It means that a mediator has to convince all sides of his neutrality, but also of his commitment to the interest of the people and to peace. There should be no preconceived scenario, or hidden agenda, whatever their merits. It should be clear that the agreement is going to be the result of a long process of give and take, to which all sides feel that they have had an equal chance to make a contribution.

It is by acquiring this trust that the mediator can mobilize all the forces of peace in the country, including whatever remains of the civil society. There are a number of steps which can be taken for this civil society to emerge, and to help check and control the influence of warlords or over-ambitious political leaders. Tribal elders, religious leaders, merchants, women and youth groups can and should be encouraged to play a role in the mediation process. But they should also be given the necessary means to achieve this. Here we should realize the vital importance of humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programs in conflict management. It is through these programs, if they are adequate, well timed, well coordinated, and consistent that the different components of the civil society will begin to emerge, organize, and gradually become efficient.

If the civil society is not part of a final agreement, that agreement stands little chance of holding, or of being a solid base for building peace.

Mohamed M. Sahnoun

(Mr. Sahnoun, former Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General in Somalia, is currently Pearson Fellow at the International Development Research Center in Ottawa.)

Learning to live with mines

In Africa, there are about 30 million mines scattered over 18 countries. There at least 9 million in Angola alone. How many people die each year because of them, and without receiving medical attention? It's impossible to even hazard a guess.

The main victims of these cruel weapons are not soldiers, but civilians, mostly women and children. For when a war ends, the mines remain, striking indiscriminately. In Libya, 27% of the arable land has been unusable since World War II; and in Angola, UNHCR experts estimate that it will take more than 30 years to clear all the mines.

In Mozambique, following 16 years of civil war, there are over 1 million mines, most of them scattered at random. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, there are up to 2 million mines, and in Sudan between 500,000 and 2 million.

Children are especially at risk: plastic mines look like toys to them.

Fields, forests and even whole villages are left abandoned for years. This prevents any economic and social development in some regions and is a source of continual worry and danger for the people who live there.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported to a 1993 symposium on anti-personnel mines held in Montreux, Switzerland, that after 15 years of war in Angola, one person in 470 has had a limb amputated. In Mozambique, according to Handicap International, a French relief organization, there are at least 20,000 amputees.

The large number of civilian victims makes this a matter of increasing humanitarian concern. UNHCR's mandate is to protect refugees and to find lasting solutions to their problems. Mine clearance may be essential to the successful execution of that mandate. One cannot repatriate refugees if the risks are too great.

UNHCR is, however, clearly not equipped to undertake the physical task of locating and clearing mines. It must, therefore, intercede with governments, the United Nations and public opinion, to act quickly and decisively to ensure returning refugees a safe future.

After living in camps for so long, refugees are often unaware of the dangers mines pose. They must be warned as early as possible, preferably before they leave the camps, and UNHCR has initiated various programs to this end.

Experts survey dangerous areas and mark mined land. UNHCR has organized major information campaigns instructing the unwary against removing the warning signs which they often use for firewood, or install in their homes because they find them decorative.

Many Africans must simply learn to live with mines. In Mozambique and the surrounding asylum countries, UNHCR is working with various international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, in Malawi – which is still host to over 600,000 Mozambican refugees – the International Rescue Committee (IRC), UNHCR and mine clearance experts from Norwegian People's Aid have set up a program to teach the people survival techniques. Two hundred refugees, most of them teachers, have been trained to provide information to other displaced people, and they have already reached an audience of 250,000 exiles.

"We're not trying to teach them how to handle mines," said Ron Robinson, International Rescue

Committee chief in Malawi. "We simply aim to explain to them what they should do if they find themselves on land that has been mined. And, in particular, what they should tell their children. Even quite recently, a 16-year old boy brought a grenade home with him and it exploded when he was playing with it."

Children are especially at risk: plastic mines look like harmless toys to them. A 1992 report from the hospital in Hargeisa, Somalia, revealed that 75 percent of mine victims were children. As Heywote Hailemeskal, a senior program officer, points out, "a disabled child needs regular treatment. He has to change his prosthesis every six months." As each one costs on average $125, this is a luxury that very few African families can afford.

To make as many refugees as possible aware of the problem, UNHCR supplements the training programs with mass public information campaigns. It distributes material which publicizes the danger of mines: T-shirts, large pieces of cloth, posters, exercise books and pencils, mostly simple objects which are both instructive and useful. Children are given these rewards for attending classes telling them about mines.

Robinson says that in southern Malawi, UNHCR supports local musicians and actors who give performances explaining the problems with mines. "Technical information has been translated into the local dialects in a practical and amusing way," he said. "These performances have been a great success in the refugee camps."

UNHCR will launch an awareness campaign for Somali refugees in Ethiopia shortly. A similar operation was envisaged in Angola and surrounding countries, but it has had to be postponed for the moment because of the lack of security.

UNHCR has directly financed mine clearance in exceptional cases where neither local governments nor other U.N. organizations were able to act before the refugees returned. From 1991 to 1993, it spent $5.5 million on a mine clearance program for northwest Somalia. Rimfire, a British company that specializes in defusing explosives devices, ▶

deployed 440 locally trained Somali mine clearers to deactivate 10,000 mines. However, there are still 1 million undetected mines in the same area and the operation is continuing through 1994 under the supervision of UNOSOM, the U.N. peacekeeping force in Somalia.

Armies lay two different kinds of mines: large anti-tank mines, and anti-personnel mines which are often designed to maim rather than to kill. These are small, light objects, generally made of plastic, that are difficult to detect and cost a mere $3 to $5 per mine. According to Neill Wright, special adviser to UNHCR on military and logistic matters, there has been great technical progress in mine clearance, but the new, sophisticated methods are extremely expensive and systematic mine clearance remains a utopian dream for African countries.

As long as large-scale wars continue, the situation will undoubtedly deteriorate. The ICRC estimates more than 95 manufacturers in 48 countries are producing between 5 and 10 million anti-personnel mines each year; and there are more than 300 different types available. The mines found in Africa are Russian, Chinese, Italian, American, British, Belgian, Czech, Egyptian, South African, Pakistani... indeed there are few countries that have not contributed to this form of blind terrorism.

This calamitous situation can only be countered effectively on a worldwide basis. At present, the sole international legal instrument that refers directly to mines is a Protocol to a United Nations Convention of 10 October 1980 which refers to "the prohibition or limitation of the use of mines, traps and other devices." It suggested registering and mapping minefields so they could be speedily cleared after the end of hostilities, and urged that all mines be fitted with mechanisms to deactivate or neutralize them.

The Convention in its present form is ineffective: only about 40 countries have so far ratified it. The only African countries to have signed it are Benin, Tunisia and Niger.

Furthermore, the Convention officially applies only to international and armed conflicts, whereas virtually all the wars in Africa at the moment are internal ones.

At the request of France, U.N. experts this year began looking at possible amendments to the 1980 Convention and these will be presented to an Examining Conference next year. Human rights activists across the globe have been trying to mobilize their governments to accept the existing convention and take part in the 1995 summit. In the end, the only truly effective way to end the proliferation of mines would be to ban their production entirely.

LAURENCE FABRY

Mine clearance in Mutarara, Mozambique. After 16 years of civil war, there are over 1 million mines scattered at random across the country.

UNHCR / P. Moumzis

Unsafe and insecure

On 14 April 1994, eight days after wholesale ethnic carnage erupted in Rwanda in the wake of the death of the country's president, a UNHCR sub-office in Bukavu, Zaire, received a visit from a priest who had been in radio contact with members of his order in the Rwandese town of Cyangugu, a few kilometers away across the border. The priest related how a group of 3,000 terrified people were trapped inside a cathedral where they had gone to seek sanctuary from the widespread slaughter taking place in the surrounding countryside. Armed soldiers and civilians were reported to be outside the cathedral. The priest begged UNHCR to intervene.

The previous day, in an event with obvious and chilling parallels, 1,200 people, many of them women and children, had been massacred in a church in Gikoro, Rwanda. The victims were killed in particularly horrifying ways, including dismemberment, disemboweling and decapitation.

The head of the UNHCR sub-office – well aware of the colossal risk he was taking – crossed the border in an attempt to persuade the local authorities in Cyangugu to help the trapped people leave unharmed and, if they wished, to escape across the border to Zaire, where they could be cared for by international agencies. Although he was not permitted to see the trapped people, he managed to speak to the assistant *prefet* and a military commander, who said that the small group of soldiers outside the cathedral were protecting the people inside from armed extremist groups. Unconfirmed reports suggested that at least 7,500 people had already been massacred in surrounding parishes. Some were reported to have been locked inside religious buildings into which hand-grenades were then thrown.

The following day, the people were moved to a nearby sports stadium and the military presence guarding them was slightly reinforced. By April 20, their number had risen to 6,000. The UNHCR office in Bukavu continued to monitor the situation, alerting headquarters in Geneva and the U.N. Department of Peace-keeping in New York, as well as other humanitarian agencies in the area. At the time of going to press, the fate of the 6,000 people in Cyangugu was still in the balance.

This episode was unusual in that it involved an attempt by UNHCR to rescue internally displaced people rather than refugees. It also illustrates the difficulties of protecting people who have not managed to cross a border. Unfortunately, refugees are sometimes caught up in similar situations: 275,000 Burundi refugees who fled to Rwanda to escape massacres in their own country in October 1993, found themselves caught up in an almost identical situation in Rwanda six months later. Under such extreme circumstances, it can be next to impossible for humanitarian organizations to provide effective physical protection.

> Asylum countries bear full responsibility for the physical safety of refugees.

In Africa, there are currently over 6 million refugees. To cope with this huge number of vulnerable people, UNHCR has around 270 international staff members scattered around the continent – one UNHCR staff member for every 23,000 refugees.

Obviously, possibilities of direct physical intervention of the type described above are limited. Humanitarian relief workers run a very high risk of being killed or seriously injured intervening in situations where the odds are so heavily stacked against success.

UNHCR emergency officer Filippo Grandi points out: "Emergencies often occur in places where security is fragile. There's civil war, terrorists, mines, bombs, bandits, thieves – you name it. Carefulness, prudence is the name of the game. You're not there just to be a hero. If you're able to deliver a program, save lives and bring help to people, then it can be worth taking some risks. But if you're not in a position to be really effective, then you would do better to get out."

For these practical reasons, not to mention the limitations imposed by mandates and other considerations such as national sovereignty, asylum countries bear full responsibility for the physical safety of refugees. Nevertheless, international agencies such as UNHCR, the ICRC and the NGOs who struggle to assist and protect refugees often play an active role in the physical protection of refugees.

UNHCR attempts to ensure adequate security by advising governments how to establish and improve security, by constantly monitoring the situation and by protesting privately and publicly when refugees are exposed to hazardous situations.

Physical threats come in many shapes and forms, one of the most serious being continued exposure to the conflict taking place in the country of origin. This risk is greatest when asylum countries – usually against UNHCR advice – decide to locate refugee camps close to borders.

Continued geographical, military or political entanglement – however involuntary – with the conflict that caused them to flee may in turn lead to the mistaken or genuine association of refugees with guerrilla movements, to forced recruitment of refugees into such movements, and ▶

▶ to cross-border attacks on refugee camps. UNHCR and other agencies are sometimes denied access to camps close to borders, and are therefore unable to assess the situation properly, let alone ensure adequate protection.

During the late 1980s, there were a number of attacks on refugee camps in southern Africa and the Horn of Africa, some by government forces, others by opposition groups. Recent incidents have included the aerial bombing of a UNHCR base camp in Vahun in the Upper Lofa region of Liberia on 23 September 1993, which resulted in the deaths of eight Sierra Leonean refugees and displaced Liberians, with 44 wounded. The victims were queuing to receive food at the time. Although many questions surrounding this event remain unanswered, the planes that carried it out were widely reported to have been aiming for rebels involved in the conflict in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Because of the chronic insecurity in Mogadishu, Somalia, relief supplies have to be guarded round the clock .

Other – often overlapping – physical threats to refugees include the proliferation of firearms, rape, ethnic rivalries among the refugees themselves and persecution by local inhabitants (usually for ethnic or economic reasons), or by security personnel in the asylum country.

Virtually all these problems have been on display in north-eastern Kenya since 1991-92, when the spiralling conflict and famine in Somalia led to an influx of nearly 300,000 Somali refugees.

The majority – around 170,000 – are living in four camps around the town of Dadaab in Kenya's arid North Eastern Province. Plagued by roaming bands of ruthless, heavily armed bandits specializing in robbery, gang-rape and murder, these camps have been a protection nightmare since they were first set up.

Dozens of refugees and – in 1993 alone – around 40 Kenyan policemen have been killed by the bandits. Refugee women have been abducted (some for a few days or weeks, others never to be seen again) and hundreds have been raped, either during the day while outside the camps collecting firewood or at night in their own huts, often in front of their children. Over four-fifths of the 192 victims interviewed during a 1993 UNHCR assessment had been raped by more than one of their attackers, and some by as many as nine or ten different men during a single attack. Many rape victims suffered severe beatings and knife wounds. People who attempt to resist the bandits are usually killed.

Conditions in and around the Dadaab camps have been so dangerous, that relief workers must travel with armed escorts and live in tents protected by sandbags. Vehicles have been repeatedly hijacked while driving to and from the camps; a female doctor working for an NGO was gang-raped; a male relief worker was shot and injured. It is a miracle that no relief workers have been killed: "On one occasion," recalls Julie Bissland, who spent 16 months as a UNHCR protection officer in Dadaab, "three armed bandits tried to steal a vehicle from a UNHCR staff member in one of the camps. They were unable to start it, and ordered the UNHCR guy to

start it for them. When he refused, two of them pulled their triggers but luckily both guns failed to go off."

The long history of lawlessness in Kenya's North-Eastern Province, the proliferation of firearms in the area and inadequate policing have played key roles in this chronic lack of security. However, clan rivalries originating in Somalia are also to blame: many of the rape victims are asked the name of their clan or sub-clan before being raped. The intention seems to be to humiliate or gain revenge on the entire clan.

In October 1993, acting on the findings of the sexual violence assessment, UNHCR appealed for $1.1 million to fund a special program designed to improve security in the camps, and upgrade the medical care and counselling available to victims. Around 75 percent of the funding was for preventive measures, such as constructing fences in and around the camps, establishing zonal security and surveillance networks involving the refugees themselves, and providing the Kenyan police with additional vehicles, communications equipment and other assistance to help them improve their controversial protection record.

By April 1994, some signs of improvement had occurred, not least because of increased awareness and participation by the refugees themselves in the wake of a public awareness campaign in the camps and special training of several hundred refugee-workers. With UNHCR assistance, the refugees have begun planting impenetrable "live" thornbush fencing around vulnerable areas of the camps.

The police and military, who undoubtedly have a difficult and dangerous task in attempting to control the bandits, also appear to be improving the efficiency and sensitivity of their patrols, as well as starting to discipline their own men when they commit crimes against refugees.

How the bandits respond remains to be seen. Their predatory habits are so ingrained over decades that, even without the instability in Somalia that feeds them guns and provides them with a haven of lawlessness, they would be hard to eradicate. So long as the refugee camps continue to exist in Kenya's North-Eastern Province, the bandits are likely to view them, and the relief operation that helps them to survive, as fat targets. The best that can be hoped for is to minimize the physical threat they pose for the refugees.

One country frequently praised for the way it handles physical threats to refugees, is Tanzania. Over the past 30 years, Tanzania has received major influxes of refugees at least twice from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Mozambique. It is, as a result, one of the most experienced refugee-hosting countries in Africa.

Following the attempted military coup and ensuing ethnic holocaust in Burundi in October 1993, the Tanzanian government showed once again that it had learned from previous experiences: many refugees were moved to existing settlements far from the border. A handful of new settlements were created, and, given the prevailing circumstances, Hutus and Tutsis were separated to prevent any continuation of their ethnic conflict on Tanzanian soil. Ethnically mixed couples and their children, who might be at risk in either Hutu or Tutsi settlements, were settled in urban areas. Arms found in camps were removed with a minimum of fuss. The government also took care not to ignite local resentment, by placing the new settlements on land that was not owned or coveted by Tanzanians who, as a result, continued to show sympathy and generosity towards the refugees. As Oluseyi Bajulaiye, a UNHCR senior legal adviser, points out: "The Tanzanian reaction to the Burundi influx showed a well-oiled machine."

> "By holding refugees in border camps, governments help nourish insecurity which is then blamed on the refugees."

Other countries that have shown a firm commitment to prevent refugees from getting embroiled in cross-border problems include Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, which respectively host 250,000 and 415,000 Liberian refugees. Both countries reinforced security along their borders with Liberia, making it very clear they would not tolerate any untoward activities by any of the Liberian factions on their territory.

The importance of locating refugee camps away from borders was explicitly recognized in Article II.6 of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa: "For reasons of security, countries of asylum shall, as far as possible, settle refugees at a reasonable distance from the frontier of their country of origin."

The border issue is crucial, according to Nicolas Bwakira, director of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Africa. "African governments are becoming more inclined to keep refugees away, in order – as they see it – to keep problems away. Some of them believe there is a problem of contamination of their societies. In fact, by holding refugees in border camps, in bandit country, they help nourish insecurity which is then blamed on the refugees. It becomes a vicious circle, with the refugees and asylum as the ultimate victims."

In particular, the linkage of refugees with armed national liberation movements, as a result of the geographical location of camps, has dangerous long-term ramifications, with refugees starting to be perceived by some governments as one of the causes of insecurity rather than as a product of it. Not only are the lives of refugees endangered by the possibility of cross-border attacks aimed at opposition forces, the idea of asylum is itself undermined. According to Bwakira, "It's a fundamental issue because it could mean the end of the policy of asylum in Africa."

Rupert Colville

Prevention as the best solution

An account of the refugee crisis in Africa in the 1990s reads like a series of entries in the *Guinness Book of World Records* under the heading "Misery". The African continent harbors the world's largest refugee population, the world's largest population of people displaced within the borders of their own countries and the world's oldest refugee population. As wars, civil conflicts and massacres of civilians have replaced independence struggles, the numbers of dead and displaced victims of conflict keep rising. Twenty-five years ago, there were fewer than 1 million refugees in Africa. Ten years ago there were under 3 million. Today, there are over 6 million refugees, with another 15 million internally displaced people.

When UNHCR was created in 1951, it was in response to the 2 million people displaced in Europe by World War II. It was given the responsibility of assisting governments to protect them and to find durable solutions to their plight, such as voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin, integration in their countries of asylum or resettlement to a third country. By completing this task, the organization was expected to make itself obsolete within a few years.

More than 40 years down the road, and many refugee crises later, finding solutions for Africa's refugees represents one of the biggest challenges facing UNHCR, as the organization seeks to define what its role and activities should be in the turbulent times that lie ahead.

There are a small number of refugees for whom a durable solution has to be sought on a case by case basis: the severely traumatized, people with political affiliations or opinions their government abhors, the army officer or politician who risks his life by opposing government measures to crush political opposition.

UNHCR promotes resettlement for these and other cases too. Claire Hamlisch, chief of UNHCR's resettlement section, believes that "a resettled person is an ambassador for his people, a living story. An African refugee brings Africa alive for ordinary people in his host country, and that fosters understanding, support for development, and the sense of a shared world that many people appreciate."

Many resettled Africans are able to resume normal lives. A few, however, finding themselves unemployed, marginalized, exploited, and discriminated against, end up requesting to return. Starting afresh in a strange country is a high-risk undertaking, which some people cannot negotiate successfully, even with the integration assistance voluntary agencies and government institutions provide.

Resettlement has never really been available for the majority of Africa's millions of refugees. In 1993, UNHCR placed 9,406 of the 10,703 African refugees specifically identified as needing resettlement. "The African continent has always had to take responsibility for its own refugees to a much greater extent than any other region in the world," comments Wallaya Pura, the UNHCR resettlement officer in charge of trying to place African refugees.

For a long time, this did not constitute a problem: extending warm-hearted hospitality to all and sundry is an African trademark. Many African refugees have found solace in the homes of people who live just across the border.

The goodwill showed by ordinary people also existed on a political level, as evidenced by the ratification by the great majority of African countries of a home-grown refugee Convention to complement that of 1951. Recalls Brian Neldner, director for World Services of the Lutheran World Federation: "The 1969 OAU Convention broke new ground in many ways – in terms of its generosity, in the fact that NGOs were consulted in its elaboration and in its affirmation that taking in a refugee constituted a humanitarian and not a political act." Back in the 1970s, when they could afford it politically, economically and socially, African countries' treatment of refugees could have earned them another mention in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, this time under "Compassion and Solidarity."

In those days, local integration in other African countries was a viable solution for a significant proportion of the relatively small number of African refugees. The OAU set up a bureau for placing qualified refugees in member countries, in an attempt to cast a net in the outflow of the brain drain.

Many African refugees have found solace in the homes of people who live just across the border.

In Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia, to name just a few, over 350,000 refugees have since the 1960s settled for long periods or permanently, achieving food self-sufficiency. In some countries they were allocated land plots of between 3 and 5 hectares. Burundi refugees in Katumba settlement in Tanzania account for most of the cereal production in their area. Tanzania's former president, Julius Nyerere, received UNHCR's Nansen Medal when, among its many other servic-

UNHCR P Mayes

Somali refugees arriving in Mombasa harbor, Kenya, in August 1992.

es to refugees, Tanzania became the first African country to offer the possibility of naturalization to refugees on a large scale.

In the 1990s, local integration in other African countries faces considerable constraints, though settlements remain a viable solution for large populations of rural refugees who are likely to have to remain in exile for a long time. When a country does not have land to spare for refugees, or where there are qualified urban refugees, a problem arises. "Most African governments today have a big enough headache trying to think of how to create enough jobs and ensure adequate social services for their own nationals, let alone for the people from next door" explains Ngung Etul-Mpwotsh, Director of the OAU Bureau for Refugees.

It's not only the social fall-out African governments are concerned about, it's the cost. Funding contributions from the international community are readily quantified. It is more difficult for African governments to assess the cost of land donated for asylum purposes, or of health, social, technical and security staff deployed to meet the needs of the refugees. Wounded, traumatized, malnourished refugee populations, comprising mainly women and children, can be very demanding in terms of health services. Typically, refugees outnumber local patients in refugee-hosting communities, as in Aour Assa hospital, Djibouti.

The sheer physical presence of thousands of refugees in one place entails costs above and beyond their care and maintenance. Rarely if ever do host countries measure the impact on their infrastructure and natural resource base. UNHCR's Program and Technical Support Section estimates that 30,000 Sudanese refugees in Northern Uganda use up 1,600 hectares of undisturbed forest as fuel-wood every year. In Malawi, it found that the rural road network in refugee-hosting areas was severely damaged by the 60 percent increase in traffic brought about by the transport of food relief. The multiplier effect of this was increased transport costs and difficulties for the Malawian residents in moving their agricultural produce to market.

While many African countries can no longer afford to offer large numbers of refugees local integration as a durable solution, they are still hosting the largest overall refugee population in the world. Some refugees remain in their asylum countries for years, or even decades.

This is not because African refugees find life in exile so sweet that they don't want it to end – though many Mozambican refugees living in South Africa are looking at their children coming home from school in safety every day, thinking of their mined fields at home, and concluding that they are better off where they are. The great majority of African refugees simply wish to be allowed to go back home and piece their lives together again; their preferred solution is voluntary repatriation. In 1993, 650,000 Mozambicans undertook the journey home; 60,000 Burundis did the same, as did 250,000 Somalis preferring continuing violence and insecurity at home to continuing exile. ▶

The preferred solution

Voluntary repatriation is undoubtedly the preferred solution for most African refugees. "One thing I have observed is that people have this strong, compelling urge to go home. Their yearning to return to their homeland is not reduced by the time they spend away," says David Lambo, Coordinator of the Mozambique Repatriation Operation, the largest such program ever undertaken by UNHCR in Africa.

Voluntary repatriations become durable solutions under certain basic conditions, most of which are in place in Mozambique. Since January 1993, more than 650,000 people have returned. They have reason to hope. The political will to end the fighting which led to the displacement has been demonstrated through the progressive implementation of a negotiated peace agreement. The UN has stationed in Mozambique the third largest peace-keeping force in the world. And UNHCR is able to fully exercise its mandate to assist and protect returnees as a result of tripartite agreements signed between the government of Mozambique, UNHCR, and the asylum countries -- Malawi, which hosted the largest number of refugees, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. By 1996, UNHCR's $203 million repatriation and reintegration program is aiming to empty camps and settlements in neighboring countries, and to set 1.5 million returning Mozambicans on the road to self-sufficiency.

"There is more to voluntary repatriation than merely going back across a border with a bucket and a blanket" says Yvette Stevens, chief of the Program and Technical Support Section. UNHCR is collaborating with other agencies and organizations to provide thousands of families with shelter materials, seed kits and agricultural tools. Quick Impact Projects are restoring roads, water supplies and health facilities in returnee areas, benefitting whole communities. Mine-awareness campaigns are being carried out and a social services component is targetting vulnerable groups. Undeterred by the obstacles, not even by 2 million landmines, Mozambicans are returning home to build a new future.

▶ But as fast as people are insisting on going home, peace or no peace, new conflicts are creating new refugees and resumption of conflicts is forcing refugees "into orbit." By mid-April, at least 11,000 of the 275,000 Burundis who fled to Rwanda after the killings in their country last October had returned to Burundi to escape the recent massacres in Rwanda. And what of the 95,000 people who returned to Angola in 1992?

Nicolas Bwakira, Director of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Africa, believes that things can only get worse. "There is going to be more and more displacement in Africa. All existing conflicts have a real potential to spread regionally. Wherever you look, east, west, south, north, Africa is already burning." Bwakira sees the conflicts as desperate struggles by different interest groups to secure for themselves access to or control of economic resources in the face of the pauperization of the continent.

Whether it's as obvious as the Konkombas fighting the Dagombas for the right to own land in fertile northern Ghana, displacing an estimated 130,000 Ghanaians in the process, or whether it is masked as ethnic conflict, religious conflict, or conflict over the right to self-determination, the real issue is survival.

As there doesn't seem enough to go round, whoever gains power on a limited ticket, in rewarding his support group, marginalizes other parts of society and the country.

As the share of African countries in world trade and creation of wealth shrinks, health care, education opportunities and jobs are disappearing. Many African populations today are worse off than 15-20 years ago. The continent is in a desperate state. And yet the example of Africa's entrepreneurial and industrialising peoples, for example the Dioula in West Africa, shows that the creation of wealth can be independent of the exercise of political power.

If refugees are a symptom of conflicts, and conflicts themselves a symptom of an underlying malaise, then action can be envisaged at two levels: the humanitarian response of providing relief assistance and protection to victims of conflict, and preventive action at two levels – short-term action to reduce refugee flows when conflicts have already occurred, and more durable activity to tackle root causes leading to conflict. In addition to its traditional humanitarian role, UNHCR is already undertaking preventive action of the first kind in Somalia. By distributing food, providing basic amenities destroyed by fighting (water supply, education, infrastructure) and restoring opportunities for income-generation in what is called a cross-border operation, UNHCR managed to reduce the exodus of refugees to Kenya from an average of 900 people a day in 1992 to zero in 1993. A similar operation is being envisaged for the Rwandese population near the border with Burundi.

Cross-border operations represent an innovation with many advantages: they spare people the trauma of displacement, relieve neighboring countries of the burden of playing host, and set up favorable conditions for returning populations. Nevertheless, they are short-term and localized measures that do not address the root problems.

If indeed prevention is acknowledged to be the best solution for the African refugee crisis, then all the relevant international,

regional and bilateral agencies will have to envisage activities with a more definite prevention orientation: for instance, strengthening the conflict prevention and resolution mechanism established within the OAU in June 1993. An augmented role would need to be devised for agency representatives to monitor and report on human rights situations. This would include making their representation on these issues to the government in question, particularly when abuses threaten to lead to population movements, and sharing information on significant developments that would enable concerted action to be taken by the OAU, the UN and all concerned parties including refugee-hosting neighboring countries.

Advocacy would be a pivotal role for UNHCR to play in this "prevention is the solution" approach: to highlight the root cause of the refugee-producing situation, to emphasize the limits of UNHCR's intervention, to call on all players to discharge their responsibilities, and to draw attention to the consequences of not addressing the root causes. Says High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, "As new refugee problems have developed – or old ones have been aggravated – in recent years, one lesson that emerges very clearly is the need for earlier and more effective action by the international community to forestall potentially refugee-generating situations before flight becomes the only alternative."

> "There is going to be more and more displacement in Africa. All existing conflicts have a real potential to spread regionally."

While UNHCR can advocate, it cannot produce favorable terms of trade for African countries, cannot stem South-North capital flows which far exceed flows of humanitarian and development assistance, cannot direct development efforts at the flashpoints that might produce refugees or at the returnee areas. Above all, it cannot challenge the credo of many of those who precipitate the conflicts that produce massive outflows of refugees, that salvation lies in monopolizing political power whatever the cost.

This, Africans will have to do themselves. Only then will the number of refugees start to drop. With the odds so heavily stacked against them, it will be a miracle if Africans succeed in resolving such massive, endemic root causes. If they do manage to do so, in the face of absolute adversity, this will represent a truly giant step for mankind.

Kanyhama Dixon-Fyle

Somali girls at a UNHCR-assisted school in Bardera, Somalia. This Quick Impact Project is part of the UNHCR cross-border operation.

UNHCR / B. Press

Ethiopia:

Boundless refugees

Thirty percent of the world's 20 million refugees are in Africa. Almost half of these uprooted people come from or have taken refuge in the Horn of Africa. There are no real frontiers for the conflicts or for their victims in this part of the continent. Its inhabitants are constantly on the move, seeking asylum from one country to another.

Famine, drought and war have unleashed these enormous waves of human migration across the region. Ethnic conflict has also played an ugly role. Africa's colonial rulers drew many frontiers without taking ethnic, economic or social realities into consideration, with disastrous consequences. Today, the Ethiopian frontier with Djibouti and Eritrea splits the Afar tribe; the border with Somalia separates the Ogaden Somalis; and in the north there are Trigrinya populations on both sides of the border with Eritrea.

Ethiopia is at the epicenter of this constant migration. Every day, 150 Sudanese cross Ethiopia's western border, fleeing repression. In the east, 10,000 Afars have fled civil conflict in Djibouti since the summer. Tribal confrontations in Kenya between the Arjuans and Degodians have displaced another 5,000 refugees. In the last five years as many as 2.5 million people have crossed Ethiopia's borders and though numbers have diminished recently, Ethiopia still provides shelter to a total of 316,000 refugees from neighboring countries.

Fatuma Dayib fled Mogadishu in 1991, abandoning a comfortable lifestyle. Her family was not so lucky. Her husband, her father, mother, brother and many friends were all killed in the bloodbath of the civil war.

At 22, her deep, dark eyes and a precious photo album she never lets out of her sight, still reflect the tragedy of Somalia.

From her exile home in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, Fatuma often boards a dilapidated bus to visit surviving relatives in the Hartisheik refugee camp in the Ogaden area of the country, one of 17 refugee centers spread across the region.

Each succeeding wave of arrivals chopped down the trees. Today, Hartisheik is a vast, depressing plain, denuded of any trees and dotted with miserable refugee shacks.

When the first wave of Somali refugees arrived in 1988, Hartisheik was chosen because in those days the area was densely covered with trees, according to Ali Ismail of the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA). By 1990, the camp had swelled to 250,000 people, the largest concentration of refugees in the Horn of Africa.

Each succeeding wave of arrivals chopped down the trees for shelter and firewood. Today, Hartisheik is a vast, depressing plain, denuded of any trees and dotted instead by a city of miserable refugee shacks.

There is one consolation in this desolate landscape. There are no fences or barriers and, Ismail insists, "Here everyone is free. This is not a concentration camp. The refugees come and go as they like. There are some who visit relatives in Somalia."

In fact, many have decided to return permanently to northeastern Somalia where there is relative peace. In the last few months, half the teachers from 29 schools in the camp have gone home. Gaps are appearing among the once tightly-packed huts. "Perhaps at the present time there are no more than 70,000 refugees in Hartisheik, but it is impossible to be sure," said local UNHCR officer Hussein Mohammed Ahmed. "The only census was taken in 1990, when they gave out the ration cards." Three years later, there are still the same number of cards in circulation. The Somalis who went home left them for their relatives or sold them.

Ismael Charman is one Somali refugee who has stayed. The 45 year-old camel herder has been living in a simple hut with his wife and four children since they arrived in 1988, staring out at the distant horizon every day remembering his former life. "I sit around all day, doing nothing," Charman said. "I cannot go home because when I get there, what would I do? I lost everything."

"Most of the refugees want to go home," said Marwan El-Khoury, UNHCR press officer for Ethiopia. "But it is a complex problem. In the Horn of Africa, what happens in one country directly affects another, which is why UNHCR believes that some political conditions and basic infrastructure reconstruction are necessary in the home countries before

we can encourage people to return."

A few kilometers from Hartisheik is Kebribeyah, home to many Ethiopian "returnee" families. Their history is written on the plains of Ogaden. Dozens of abandoned tanks are the rusting reminders of the great battle that the Ethiopian army fought there in 1977 to repel Somali occupation of the region. The Ethiopian victory caused more than half a million Ogaden inhabitants, culturally Somali and fearful of reprisals, to flee to Somalia.

They tried to return in 1987 but the Ogaden drought forced them back to Somalia. They eventually returned to Ethiopia after the change of government there in 1991.

The "returnees" are given assistance until they become self-sufficient and are fully reintegrated in their home country. The new settlements of returnees are not under the management of any organization and their residents receive food rations in exchange for work.

Near Hadew, there is another small village of Ethiopians who fled to Djibouti several years ago after government troops stole their cattle and used people as human shields in local wars. They returned in January because, as village headman Hibraim Hess recalls, "We couldn't stand the climate, it was just too hot. Some women died while we were staying there."

Life is still tough even back "home" in Hadew. OXFAM and UNHCR supplied food and seed for the returnees until their first harvest. Under a "food for work" program, a dozen village men then spent six months constructing a communal rain-water collection point to eliminate the need for their wives to trudge a full day's walk away to another distant well.

Two days before our visit a child died of malnutrition, and a woman of exhaustion. The living scratch out a meager existance. "Now I'm going to fetch wood to sell at the market," said Mulki Abdullahi, a woman of about 28. The bushes and branches are "behind the mountains," about 20 kilometers away. With the load on her back, she will make her way to the nearest town and sell it for 20 birr, a pittance equivalent to the price of three cups of tea.

"As far as the Ethiopian government and UNHCR are concerned, aid must reach all those who need it," said UNHCR's El-Khoury. "That is why we must tackle three different types of situations: those of the refugees, returnees and displaced persons."

At the end of 1984, when famine raged in Ethiopia, the government decided to transfer inhabitants of the arid Ethiopian highlands to the low, more fertile regions to the south. Over a six-month period, shuttles of 12 Antonov aircraft and 24 helicopters forcibly moved some 600,000 people. At the time, the operation was criticized as a disguised way of moving people from Tigray and Wollo, centers of anti-government guerrillas, into the government stronghold of Welega. Many displaced persons have remained there.

"Although the Welega region is rich in coffee and cotton plantations, the displaced populations have not adapted," El-Khoury said. "Many have left for the nearby cities and are living in utter destitution."

Ethiopia is full of displaced people and under its cross-mandate approach, UNHCR is formulating a program for their voluntary return. According to the plan, the displaced would be given transportation to their home areas, and basic infrastructure facilities such as hospitals, schools and wells would be reconstructed.

"How to resettle displaced people is our main challenge. They are the major problem in the Horn of Africa and throughout the continent," El- Khoury said. "It will take an equal effort in all three stages of cooperation: emergency relief, infrastructure rehabilitation and development."

At present, Ethiopia is going through a delicate political transition. As part of this process the provisional Ethiopian government is drafting a democratic constitution guaranteeing respect for all ethnic groups. The effectiveness of emergency relief and long-term reconstruction ultimately will depend on such guarantees and political stability.

IGNASI GALLART

MAIN MOVEMENTS OF REFUGEES

TO AND FROM ETHIOPIA
1977 – 1993

Began	Population	Estimated Nos.	From	To
1977-78	Ethiopian	800,000	Ethiopia	Somalia
1984-85	Ethiopian	500,000	Ethiopia	Sudan
1984	Sudanese	300,000	Sudan	Ethiopia
1987	Ethiopian	15,000	Ethiopia	Djibouti
1987	Ethiopian	5,000	Ethiopia	Kenya
1988	Somali	385,000	Somalia	Ethiopia
1991	Somali	200,000	Somalia	Ethiopia
1993	Djibouti (Afar)	10,000	Djibouti	Ethiopia

Beyond relief

The women's center at Bududuram refugee camp in Ghana is one of the busier places in a bustling Liberian refugee community about 20 km west of Accra, the capital. Last year, more than 150 refugee women from the camp built the center themselves, and now use it for a variety of programs, including construction classes, psychological counseling, public health outreach, small business management training, and a rapidly growing savings and loan program.

Bududuram's Women's Center is part of a unique initiative aimed at helping refugee women. Since most refugee families are headed by women, improving their lives brings benefits for the entire family. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have established similar centers for Liberian refugee women in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Hundreds of thousands of Liberians have fled to these two West African countries, as well as to Guinea and Sierra Leone, over the past few years to escape fighting in their homeland. As in many other conflicts, the majority of these refugees are women and children.

UNIFEM's goal is to move beyond the traditional boundaries of "relief" by supporting programs that provide women with opportunities to learn new skills that will reduce their dependence on others. The strategy calls for including refugee women in all stages of program development and operation. And as the women gain new skills and confidence, the well-being of their own families increases.

UNHCR / L. Taylor

Refugee construction trainees at the Bududuram Women's Center in Ghana. The center also offers women psychological counseling, public health outreach, small business training and a savings and loan program.

Jemima Caulcrick recently graduated from Bududuram's eight-month construction skills course along with 25 other Liberian refugee women. "When I first heard that UNIFEM and IRC were starting up a construction skills class for women, I was afraid to go," said Caulcrick, who lives at the camp with her husband and children. "My husband told me not to attend. But then we talked about it, and I decided to join the class. Now I can construct buildings and do things I have never done before."

As part of their training, Caulcrick and her classmates built a dormitory for women and children. Most of the graduates are now employed as construction workers in the camp, including Caulcrick, who is supervising work on more than 150 family latrines.

At least 20 other women at Bududuram have received training as mental health counselors, including Beatrice Jikpamu, a mother of eight who has been involved with the Women's Center since its inception in June 1992. Many of the camp's residents, including its children, went through harrowing experiences as they struggled to survive and escape the bloody conflict in their country. Many witnessed the brutal killing or rape of their own family members. Post traumatic stress disorders are common and the daily pressures of refugee life often lead to the breakdown of traditional family structures.

"People know we are available to help them with their problems," Jikpamu said. "They don't have to struggle alone."

The Women's Center also offers community health and a small business management training program. Liberian refugee Meama Duoa participates in both programs. A professional nurse in Liberia, she is one of ten refugees who completed a UNIFEM-IRC training workshop that certified her as a community health worker. She makes home visits at the camp to share information and materials about refugee family health concerns, sanitation, family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Duoa has also received a loan from the Women's Center's small business savings and loan program, which enabled her to establish a little shop. In collaboration with Women's World Banking, Ghana, the program has provided loans to more than 200 groups and individuals, mostly women, who were either starting or seeking to improve a small business in the camp. These businesses include fish smoking, used clothing, sewing and hair-dressing.

Recently, the small business program received increased funding from UNHCR, making it possible to greatly expand the number of loans.

The UNIFEM-IRC project at Bududuram has helped bring down traditional barriers and enabled women to master skills they never thought they could learn. In addition to helping themselves and their families, the women will also be able to play an active role in rebuilding their communities once they return home.

"My husband told me not to attend. But... I decided to join the class. Now I can construct buildings and do things I have never done before."

Diana Dubois & Doug Nethercut
International Rescue Committee

Is an overseas education worth it?

Bience Gawanas first became interested in the law when her brother was brutally murdered and his badly mutilated body unceremoniously dumped on a lonely rural road. Though the available evidence pointed strongly toward a local white as the murderer, Gawanas recalls those days in the early 1970s when "I sat in the court and saw the judge and the lawyers who were all white and I realized that we could never expect justice from them." That, she said, "was when I decided to become a lawyer."

With ferocious tenacity, Gawanas overcame the reluctance of South African administrators in her native Namibia and years of enforced exile from her homeland to pursue her dream and prove wrong one white inspector who told the teenager that "he didn't think I could become a lawyer because as a black child my intelligence was much lower than that of a white."

She studied initially at the University of Western Cape in South Africa. Then, as the liberation struggle raged in Namibia, she attended the University of Warwick in England. Eventually, thanks to a grant from the London-based Africa Education Trust (AET), she graduated with a first class honors degree in 1986 and later became one of the first ever Namibians to qualify as a barrister.

Gawanas subsequently returned to Namibia – though *en route* back to her homeland she was temporarily detained by SWAPO in 1988 and accused of being a spy – to a distinguished career. Currently she holds ▶

▶ a series of top-level advisory posts and became the first black female advocate in the country when she was admitted to the High Court of Namibia.

It appears self-evident that without the scholarship and the legal training in Britain, Bience Gawanas might never have fulfilled her personal goals or reached her current lofty position in Namibian society. But despite her success story and others like it, in recent years Western donors and even the governments of emerging nations have begun to question the relevance of overseas study for exiles. Is the cost of sending young people to expensive overseas schools worth it? Could the money be used more usefully in other aid projects? How many newly educated young people actually return to their homelands and even if they do, is the education they have received relevant in a newly emerging nation?

The AET, which was founded in 1958 partially to help Africans – including thousands of refugees – receive further education, has noticed a drop of around 40 percent in the last few years in aid earmarked for such educational projects. "Overall we're finding it extremely difficult to get any new funding for the education or training of refugees," AET director Michael Brophy told *Refugees* in London. "The general criticism we get is the more education refugees get, the less inclined they are to return home."

However, the AET recently published a 33-page study of scores of Namibian students who had received grants to study in England and their subsequent careers. According to Brophy, the study, entitled "The situation of AET-sponsored Namibians after their return home," helps explode many of the fears being expressed by donors. "We are very happy with the results of the study," he said, "which underline that our scholarship program has been very successful."

The report traced 60 percent of more than 300 Namibians who had been through the scholarship program, an extremely high figure for any "trace" program. According to Brophy, the majority of the "missing" 40 percent of former students had also returned home but were probably living in isolated communities in the interior of the African nation and were difficult to reach.

Of those eventually tracked down, the report indicated that virtually all the students had returned home and 95 percent were fully employed in Namibia – an extremely high percentage in a poor country wracked with unemployment and where many private employers still view overseas-trained Namibians with suspicion. Equally importantly, the educational skills learned in Britain were directly applicable to their new jobs and to the needs of an emerging nation – a happy situation not always applicable to other study programs.

The report concludes that "the overwhelming majority of the scholarship holders return to their home country, and the overseas training and qualifications obtained are acceptable and relevant to the employment situation in the home country."

Brophy said the high rate of success enjoyed by the AET was attributable to several reasons. "Some organizations accept students on other people's recommendations," he said. "We carefully select candidates ourselves. We have rejected students who are not suitable for particular courses. We also carefully screen a student's background and make sure that they are planning to study subjects relevant to the needs of the home country." Lastly, "we look for a commitment by the student that they will return to their homeland when they have finished their studies."

Former AET students form a veritable who's who of the Namibian administration and, in addition to Bience Gawanas, they include senior civil servants in the Office of the President, the Attorney General and the Ministries of Transport, Education and Home Affairs.

Helao Shityuwete is currently the deputy director of Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labor and is in no doubt about the importance of overseas scholarships. Like many Namibians of his generation he underwent a traumatic upbringing, eventually being sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in South Africa's notorious Robben Island prison – also the "home" for many years of Nelson Mandela – for alleged terrorist activities. Ironically, it was during his incarceration on the island between 1968 and 1984 that he began to study economics and commerce, among other subjects.

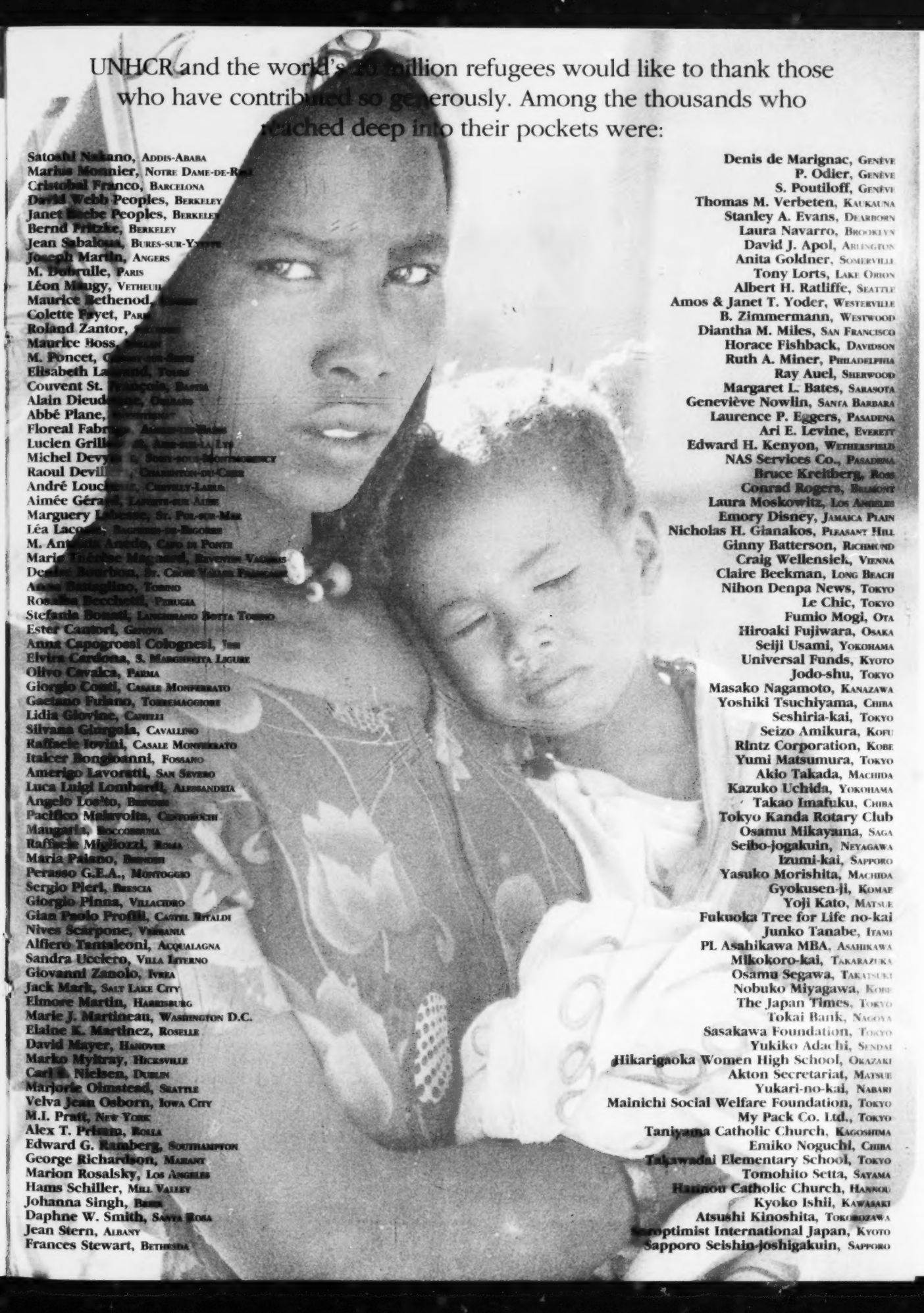
Following his prison release he obtained a scholarship to study in Britain, where he attended a series of colleges including Birmingham University, where he read development administration. After marrying a British national, UNHCR helped repatriate his family back to Namibia at independence.

"There are problems for people who have studied overseas," concedes Shityuwete. "People who have undergone technical training in England sometimes find it difficult to relate their results with conditions in Namibia. Women, too, have difficulties because the market is still male-oriented. Teachers trained abroad do not meet local requirements. And there is still a fair amount of racism about in the private sector."

Still, overseas students such as himself "are essential to the administration. Our pool of trained people would be virtually non-existent without such scholarships," he said. "I would probably be in the army if I had not got a scholarship. These programs have had a major positive impact on Namibia and its development." Adds Bience Gawanas, "I went away for 12 years and was educated. Now I have an obligation to repay." That sentiment applies to all of Namibia's scholarship winners.

"I went away for 12 years and was educated. Now I have an obligation to repay."

RAY WILKINSON



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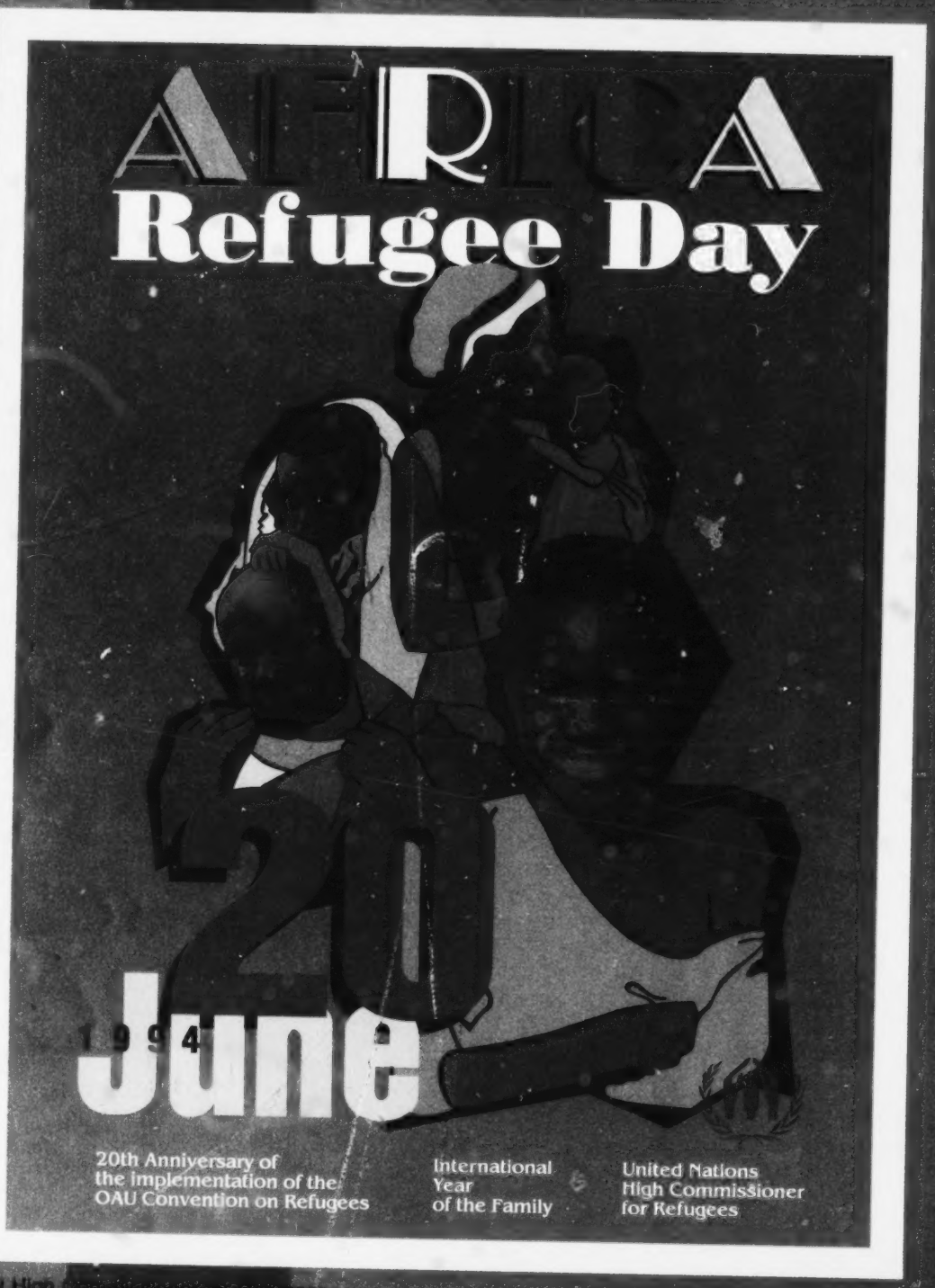

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